

Your Family's Health

Make a Difference at Your Family Reunion

The 15-minute “Make the Kidney Connection” Health Discussion

If you're able to get time on the family reunion agenda—and think that your family members would be open to a short talk—consider conducting this 15-minute “Make the Kidney Connection” health discussion. It presents a quick overview of the most important information your family members should know about kidney disease: how to know if they are at risk, how to get tested, and what can be done if they have kidney disease.

Here's how it works. Talking points are **boxed** below. Feel free to put the information into your own words. [You don't need to be a health expert to talk about kidney disease. The guide outlines the discussion and provides key talking points. You're providing basic information that family members can use to follow up with their doctor or health care provider. You can also refer them to the National Kidney Disease Education Program (NKDEP) at 1-866-4-KIDNEY (1-866-454-3639) if they have more questions.]

1. Introduce the session

Thank you for giving me some time today to talk about an important health issue – kidney disease. I recently learned that more and more people, especially African Americans, are being diagnosed with kidney disease and experiencing kidney failure, which means they have to go on dialysis or get a kidney transplant. Many people who have a greater chance of getting kidney disease don't know that they are at risk. I want us all to have many more reunions together, so I want to share this information with you.

Why should we know about kidney disease?

- Because the number of people with kidney disease is increasing rapidly. About 20 million Americans already have it.
- Because kidney disease strikes African Americans more than other groups.
- Because it is very likely that some of us are at risk. Some of us may know it, and others may not.
- And, finally, because there's good news: kidney disease can be treated and kidney failure can be prevented! I want to make sure we all know what we can do to protect our kidneys.

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2. Talk about kidney disease risk factors

Diabetes, high blood pressure, and a family history of kidney disease are the three main risk factors for kidney disease.

Keep in mind that your family members may know that they or other members of the family have diabetes or high blood pressure, or that a close family member (mother, father, sister, or brother) has kidney disease or kidney failure. But they may not know that having any one of these conditions or "risk factors" means they are more likely than other people to develop kidney disease. What do your family members know about kidney disease risk factors?

Ok, who can name one of the three leading causes of kidney disease?

Give family members a chance to offer some possible causes. You're likely to get a variety of responses. But the leading causes of kidney disease are: diabetes, high blood pressure, and a family history of kidney disease. Remember, having just one of these risk factors increases the risk of developing kidney disease.

Diabetes and high blood pressure are the two leading causes of kidney failure. They cause about 70 percent of kidney failure cases. A family history of kidney disease—your mother, father, sister, or brother had kidney disease or kidney failure—also increases a person's chance of getting kidney disease.

So, if you have diabetes OR high blood pressure OR a family history of kidney disease you are at high risk of developing kidney disease.

You don't have to raise your hand, but think about it. How many of you are at risk for kidney disease or know a family member who is at risk?



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3. Talk about testing

So, what do you do if you are at risk? Talk to your doctor or health care provider about getting tested. Testing is the only way to know if you have kidney disease. Don't wait for symptoms because THERE ARE NO EARLY SYMPTOMS. Many people don't know they have kidney disease until their kidneys are just about ready to fail. By then, it is too late to do anything other than begin dialysis or undergo a kidney transplant.

That's why testing is so important. And the tests are simple. The doctor or health care provider just tests your blood and urine for signs of kidney damage.

The good news is that if kidney disease is found there are medications called ACE inhibitors or ARBs you can take and other things you can do to slow down the damage to your kidneys. For some people, the medication can keep the kidneys from failing.

So, if you have even ONE of the risk factors we've been talking about—diabetes or high blood pressure or a family history of kidney disease—ask your doctor or health care provider to test your kidneys.

4. Talk about other steps to take to protect the kidneys

It's also important to control your diabetes and high blood pressure. By following your doctor's advice—whether that means taking medication, following a special diet or exercising—you help reduce the stress on your heart and blood vessels, which can lead to kidney disease. But even if you have your diabetes and high blood pressure under control, you still should have your kidneys tested.

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5. Encourage family members to look out for one another

Here are two suggestions for following up with family members who may be at risk for kidney disease.

- If your family is one that talks openly about their personal health conditions, you may already know which members of your family have one or more kidney disease risk factors. Make a list of these family members, and ask others to let you know—either during the session or afterward—if they have diabetes or high blood pressure or a mother, father, sister, or brother who had kidney disease or kidney failure. Collect their contact information, and give them a follow-up call, email, letter, or visit some time over the next three months to again encourage them to talk to their doctor or health care provider about getting tested for kidney disease. If there are several members of your family on the list, you can ask other family members to help with the follow up. Are there certain members of the family that family members listen to? If so, ask for their help. A friendly reminder gives you and other family members a chance to express your concern, and may be just what the family member at risk needs to take the next step.
- At the end of the session, designate a “family health buddy” for each family member. Ask family members to pair up and exchange contact information. Or, write the names of one-half of the family members on slips of paper and ask the other half to draw one name. Then, ask everyone to commit to follow up with their family health buddy at some point over the next three months to check on his or her health and to talk about whether either of them has one or more kidney disease risk factors. If so, the health buddy can encourage the family member at risk to talk to a doctor or health care provider about getting tested. Encourage family members to continue to follow up with each other, especially those who have the kidney disease risk factors or other illnesses.

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6. End the session

Thank everyone for their attention and for agreeing to look out for each other.

If you'd like to distribute NKDEP materials to your family members, visit **www.nkdep.nih.gov/familyreunion** for kidney disease resources. You can download information from the website and copy it, or you can order hard copies of materials.

If family members have questions or want more information, direct them to the website or ask them to call 1-866-4-KIDNEY (1-866-454-3639).

If family members would like more information about diabetes, direct them to the National Diabetes Education Program website (www.ndep.nih.gov) or ask them to call 1-800-438-5383.

If family members would like more information about high blood pressure, direct them to the International Society on Hypertension in Blacks (ISHIB) website (www.ishib.org), or the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute (NHLBI) website (www.nhlbi.nih.gov). They can also call 1-800-575-WELL (1-800-575-9355) for more information.

7. Let us know how it went!

Did your family enjoy the discussion? Did they learn something new? Did they have questions? Was this kit helpful to you? We'd love to hear your feedback. Visit **www.nkdep.nih.gov/familyreunion** and enter your comments in the Feedback section. We want to make this toolkit easy and valuable for African-American families, so your comments—positive and negative—about the toolkit will be greatly appreciated.

Thank you for your interest and for taking a great step toward improving your family's health!